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En Page 690

Nebraska Trails Council Statement on Effectiveness, Impact & Future of Rail Banking

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Rail banking has been vital to the development of long and short distance trails throughout Nebraska and our surrounding states. These former corridors of commerce provide the potential for our communities to transform their economies to serve current citizen needs and encourage healthy lifestyles. The ability for our railroads and nation to potentially re-use these rights-of-way in the future for rail service is simply good public policy that provides future citizens with the ability to meet their societal needs.

In Nebraska trails on rail-banked rights-of-way provide urban recreational and transportation opportunities to residents of low-income neighborhoods who traditionally are under-served in park and recreation facilities as well as transportation options. Field Club Trail in Omaha, Nebraska is a prime example of a former inner-city beltway railroad line that became a trail which is heavily used by the racial and economically diverse residents of its adjacent neighborhoods. The trail provides a safe, ADA accessible recreational trail which also provides alternate transportation connections to the University of Nebraska Medical Center, Douglas County Medical Center and Veterans' Medical Center campuses which are located along the trail.

In rural areas, former railroad lines provide the opportunity to link smaller communities together, attracting visitors who desire to engage with the rural landscape and make these towns more attract to new residents. In Central City, Nebraska, a recently rail banked corridor that is 8 miles long, will connect this small city to Marquette, Nebraska, a village of 282 residents. If rail banking continues to exist, this trail may in the future be extended to Aurora, Nebraska creating a 17 mile, fully accessible trail that crosses the Platte River in a region with few other trail opportunities.

Nebraska's Cowboy Trail which, when fully developed, will stretch 321 miles across the northern tier of our state, provides local citizens with the opportunity of close-to-home recreational experiences and attracts visitors from across the United States and the World to the communities along the trail. In rural areas throughout the United States, other recreational trails provide similar stimulus to local economies at minimal cost to the public.

The Board of the Nebraska Trails Council urges to the Surface Transportation Board to continue the Rail Banking program due to its POSTIVE impact on citizen health and the economies of local communities, its EFFECTIVE preservation of land and use of public resources, and the FUTURE benefits that rail-banked corridors provide to the citizens of the United States of American for both recreational uses and future options for TRANSPORTATION purposes.